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*The
Master Printer's
Return*



*By
Harrison Houghton*

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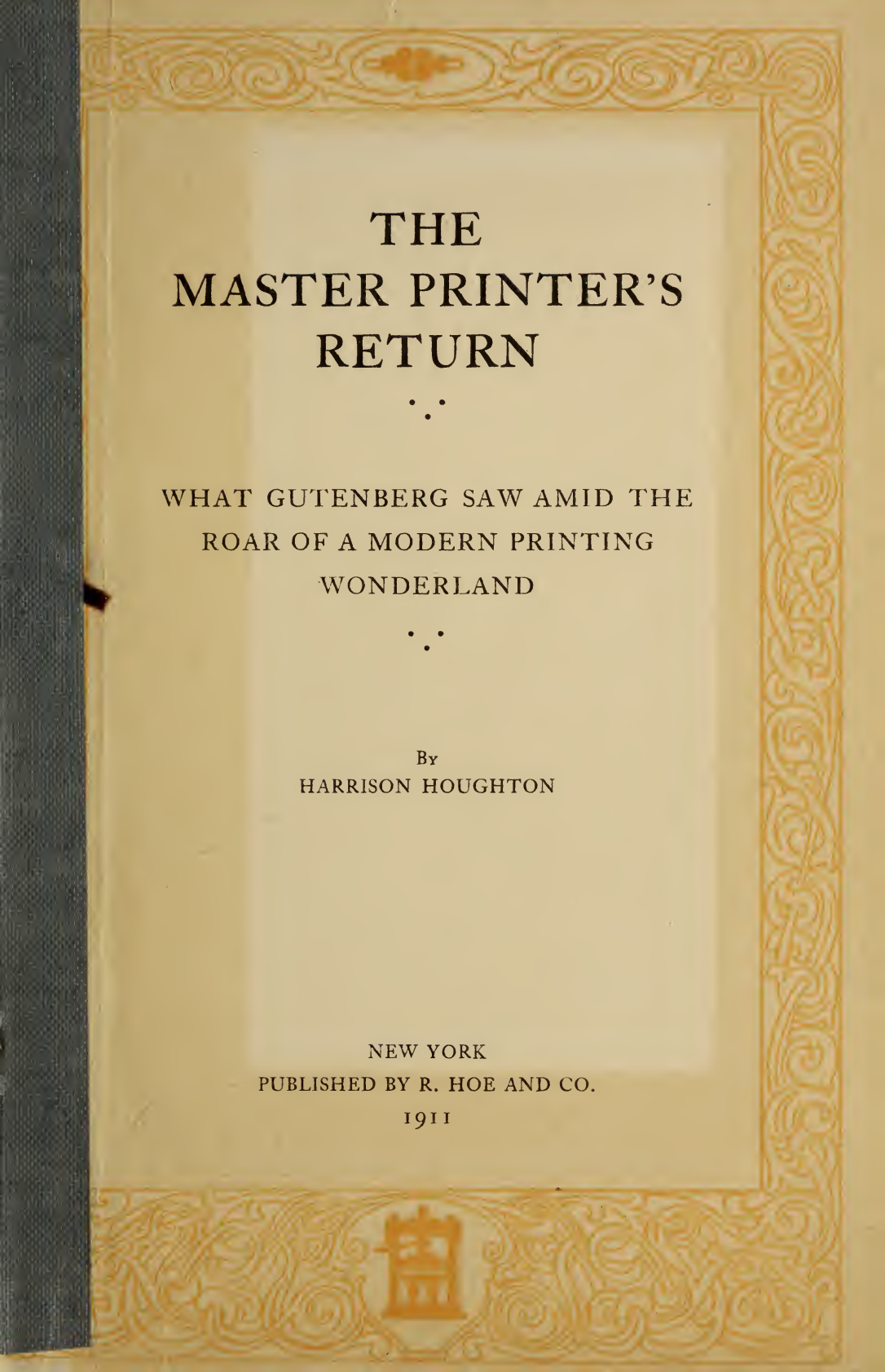
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THE
MASTER PRINTER'S
RETURN


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WHAT GUTENBERG SAW AMID THE
ROAR OF A MODERN PRINTING
WONDERLAND

∴

By
HARRISON HOUGHTON

NEW YORK
PUBLISHED BY R. HOE AND CO.
1911





JOHANNES GUTENBERG
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NE day not long ago the transparent figure of a man made its way warily, almost fearfully, across that part of Twenty-Fifth Street in New York that lies between Lexington and Third Avenues. The stranger scarcely fitted into the bustling city picture.

The face was keen, long, sharp, and bearded; the head was topped by a black cap; the body was hung with the picturesque skirted garb of the fifteenth century. It was the shade of Johannes Gutenberg, father of the printing press. He had been following the trail of print down the path of the years until now he stood at last at the threshold of his largest experience.

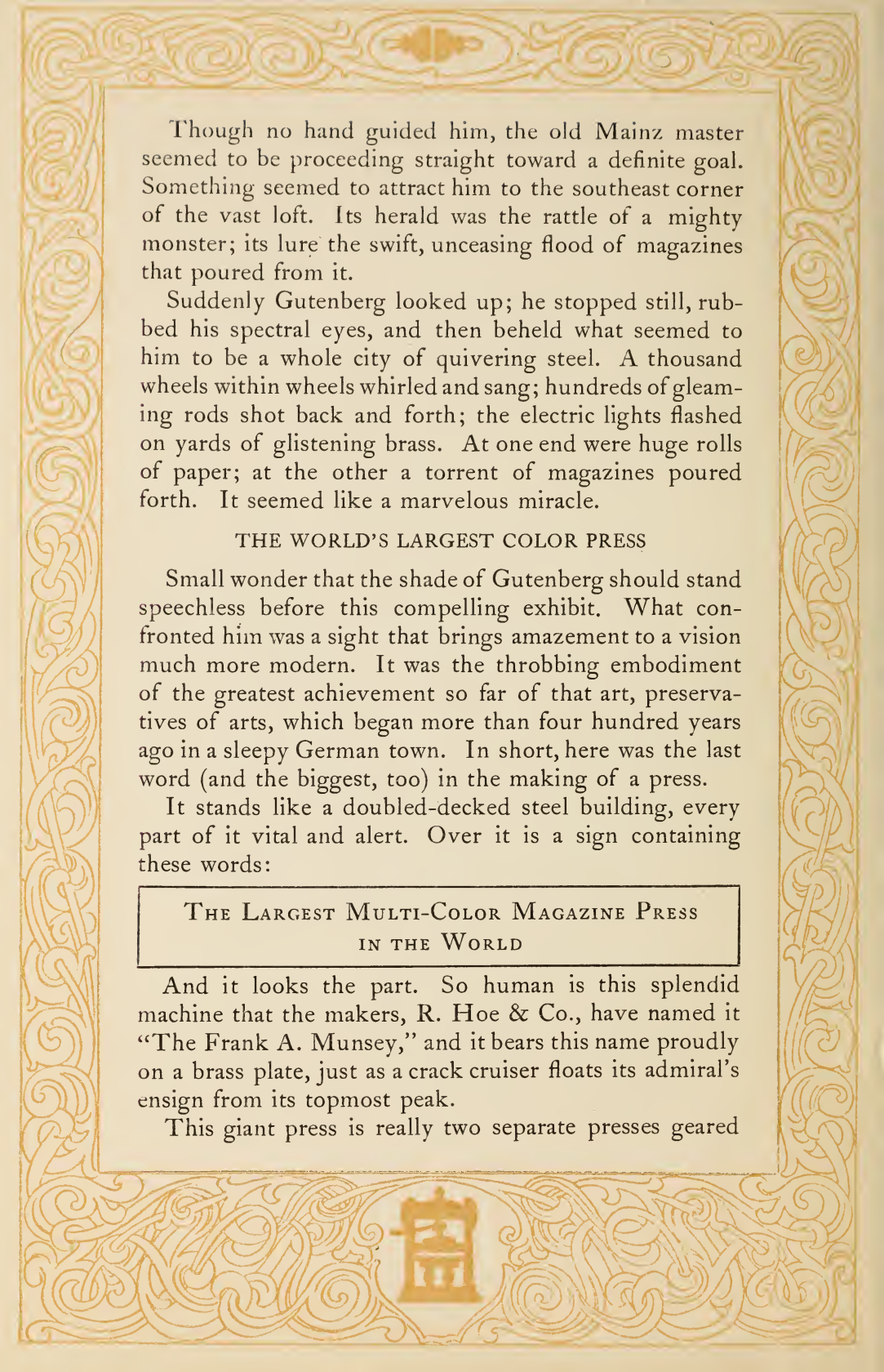
Before him a great yellow building reared its storied height. As he paused before the entrance a mighty rumble smote his ears. The structure seemed to be shaken by some tumult. It was like a thing alive.

The shade made its way up the steps to the second story, and there came to his nose the indescribable smell of ink, and it was as sweet to his nostrils as is the perfume of clover to the hungry kine. The air was vibrant with unleashed energy; on all sides men and women worked with almost feverish swiftness. He was now within the confines of the world's greatest magazine plant; nowhere else was there a publication plant just like this.

Day after day an endless stream of magazines flows from it. They appeal to every taste and every inclination. Gutenberg had never seen so much printed matter in his whole life. He stood amazed in the midst of this printing wonderland. The throb of things stirred even his ghostly soul. It seemed to rain magazines, and yet everything was done with orderly, if quick, precision. Slowly he made his way through the maze of machines where the sections of the magazines were being put together (100 miles of wire are required to staple the publications each month), down the busy aisles that reeked with print.



DIRECT
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Though no hand guided him, the old Mainz master seemed to be proceeding straight toward a definite goal. Something seemed to attract him to the southeast corner of the vast loft. Its herald was the rattle of a mighty monster; its lure the swift, unceasing flood of magazines that poured from it.

Suddenly Gutenberg looked up; he stopped still, rubbed his spectral eyes, and then beheld what seemed to him to be a whole city of quivering steel. A thousand wheels within wheels whirled and sang; hundreds of gleaming rods shot back and forth; the electric lights flashed on yards of glistening brass. At one end were huge rolls of paper; at the other a torrent of magazines poured forth. It seemed like a marvelous miracle.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST COLOR PRESS

Small wonder that the shade of Gutenberg should stand speechless before this compelling exhibit. What confronted him was a sight that brings amazement to a vision much more modern. It was the throbbing embodiment of the greatest achievement so far of that art, preservatives of arts, which began more than four hundred years ago in a sleepy German town. In short, here was the last word (and the biggest, too) in the making of a press.

It stands like a doubled-decked steel building, every part of it vital and alert. Over it is a sign containing these words:

THE LARGEST MULTI-COLOR MAGAZINE PRESS
IN THE WORLD

And it looks the part. So human is this splendid machine that the makers, R. Hoe & Co., have named it "The Frank A. Munsey," and it bears this name proudly on a brass plate, just as a crack cruiser floats its admiral's ensign from its topmost peak.

This giant press is really two separate presses geared



to work either in unison or separately. Every revolution of the cylinders prints 384 magazine pages, or as much reading matter as is contained in three ordinary novels. The electrotype plates for a single press-run weigh half a ton.

The achievement of this wonderful press is little short of incredible. It prints, folds, and delivers this extraordinary output:

144,000 eight-page sections an hour in two colors;
72,000 eight-page sections an hour in four colors;
72,000 sixteen-page sections an hour in two colors;
72,000 sixteen-page sections an hour—half in three colors, half in one color;

36,000 sixteen-page sections an hour in four colors.

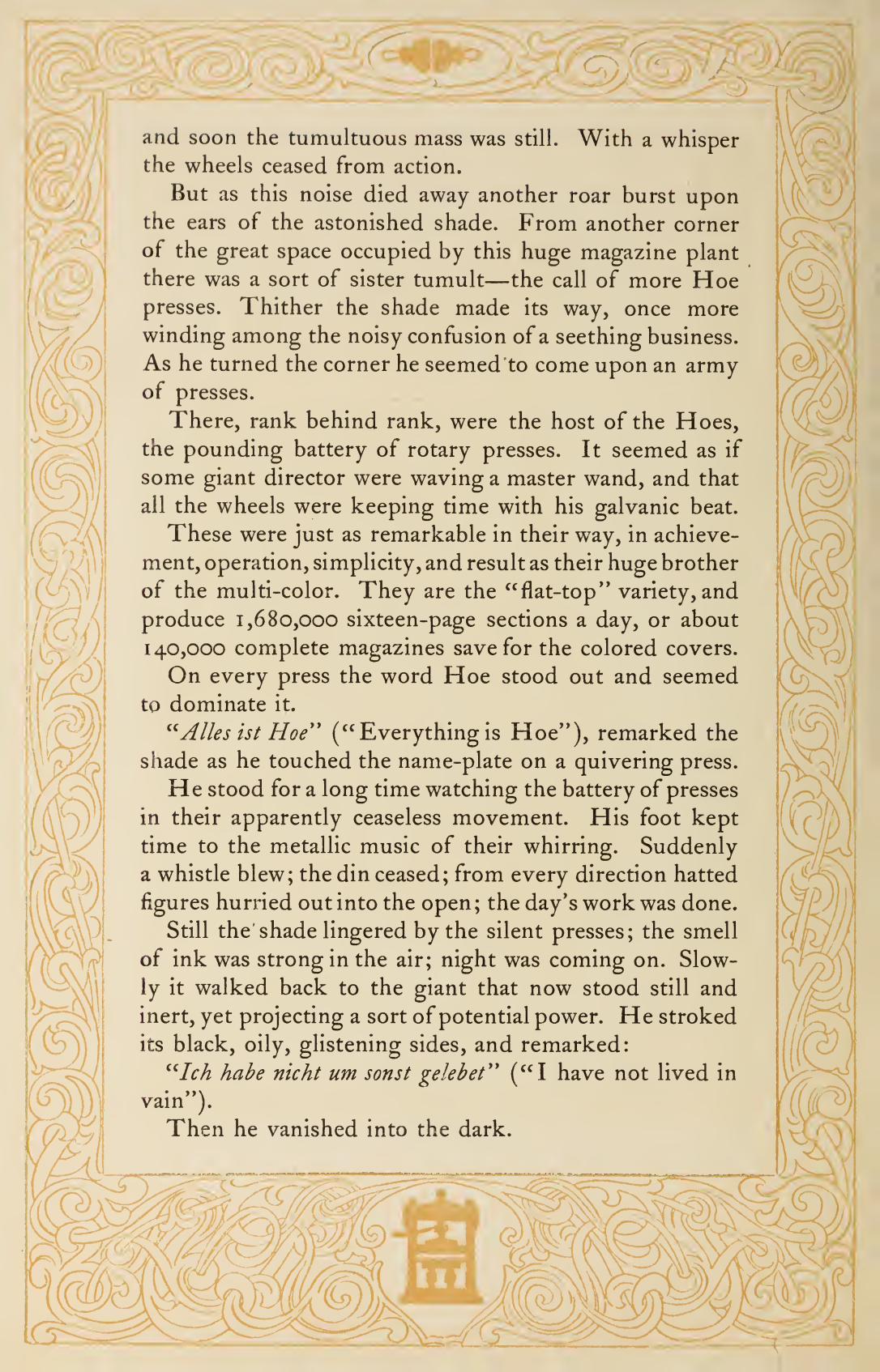
Here, indeed, is a universe of printed matter produced in an uncannily short space of time!

And yet, this towering, roaring, masterful machine was conceived, designed, and built to turn out magazines that sell for a dime.

Long and silently the shade of Gutenberg stood before this mastodonic press. How different it was from that simple, hand-made contrivance which he and his friend Fust had set up in Mainz in those long years ago; how infinitely more swiftly came the flood of magazines than did the famous "forty-two-line Bible" which the pioneers had put together with so much labor and pain when the printing art was dawning.

"*Wunderbar!*" ("Wonderful") said the shade, as he rubbed his eyes some more. The great machine seemed to have a peculiar fascination for him. He walked around it, touched its gleaming sides that were now hot with action; walked to the rear and watched the great white roll of paper unfold itself into the printed messages that went to the four corners of the world.

Suddenly a swift sort of protest came from the press; the wheels slackened; the noise died down to a whisper,



and soon the tumultuous mass was still. With a whisper the wheels ceased from action.

But as this noise died away another roar burst upon the ears of the astonished shade. From another corner of the great space occupied by this huge magazine plant there was a sort of sister tumult—the call of more Hoe presses. Thither the shade made its way, once more winding among the noisy confusion of a seething business. As he turned the corner he seemed to come upon an army of presses.

There, rank behind rank, were the host of the Hoes, the pounding battery of rotary presses. It seemed as if some giant director were waving a master wand, and that all the wheels were keeping time with his galvanic beat.

These were just as remarkable in their way, in achievement, operation, simplicity, and result as their huge brother of the multi-color. They are the “flat-top” variety, and produce 1,680,000 sixteen-page sections a day, or about 140,000 complete magazines save for the colored covers.

On every press the word Hoe stood out and seemed to dominate it.


“*Alles ist Hoe*” (“Everything is Hoe”), remarked the shade as he touched the name-plate on a quivering press.

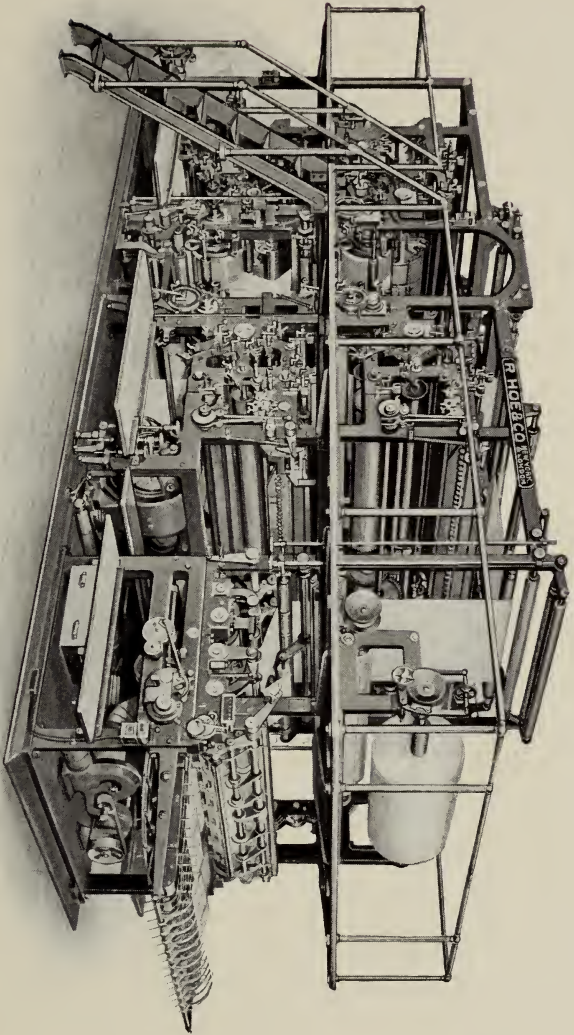
He stood for a long time watching the battery of presses in their apparently ceaseless movement. His foot kept time to the metallic music of their whirring. Suddenly a whistle blew; the din ceased; from every direction hatted figures hurried out into the open; the day’s work was done.

Still the shade lingered by the silent presses; the smell of ink was strong in the air; night was coming on. Slowly it walked back to the giant that now stood still and inert, yet projecting a sort of potential power. He stroked its black, oily, glistening sides, and remarked:

“*Ich habe nicht um sonst gelebet*” (“I have not lived in vain”).

Then he vanished into the dark.





“THE FRANK A. MUNSEY,” THE LARGEST MAGAZINE PRINTING PRESS IN THE WORLD

The achievement of this wonderful press, built by R. Hoe & Co., is little short of incredible. Among other things, it prints, folds, and delivers this amazing output: 144,000 eight-page magazine sections an hour in two colors; 72,000 eight-page sections an hour in four colors; 72,000 sixteen-page sections an hour in two colors; 72,000 sixteen-page sections an hour—half in three colors, half in one color; 36,000 sixteen-page sections an hour in four colors.



THE SECOND PHASE OF GUTENBERG'S JOURNEY INTO THE WONDER- LAND OF PRINT



IT WAS afternoon in the Elysian Fields. The clouds drifted lazily across the blue sky; the brilliant sun glittered on gleaming temple; the air was heavy with a languorous peace. Aloof from the turmoil of the world, the Shades of Men, stripped of all earthly cares, reclined and were happy, for it was like the land of the Lotus-Eaters.

Suddenly a rustle smote the lazy air, and there was an unwonted stir.

“What has happened?” they asked.

Then they saw the cause. Down the main highway there strode a picturesque figure; keen, long, sharp, and bearded of face; his head surmounted by a skull-cap; his body hung with the robes of a medieval craft. Instead of the reflective, almost benevolent calm that had always brooded over his mien, his countenance was alive, his eyes shone, and he seemed laboring under great excitement.

And well might that figure be excited, for it was the shade of Johannes Gutenberg, Father of the Printing Press, returning from his journey into the busy domain of men. He had seen a miracle, and he was eager to proclaim it. As he neared his abiding-place his pace quickened, and he appeared to hold more grimly to something that was concealed under his robe.

“Here, here,” he shouted, “I have wondrous news!” Then he sat down on a marble bench that stood in front of a replica of a certain old printing house in Mainz.

Through its quaint doorway came a group of shades, old, bearded, and garbed like himself. Leading them was Johann Fust, the Old Master's partner, who had

been in at the birth of printing in the long years ago. Then came Peter Schoffer, the son-in-law of Fust, who had also been through the travail of those early days.

Scarcely were they seated at the feet of Gutenberg than the others grouped themselves about in a circle. They were the fellow pioneers who had blazed the path of print in many lands and under many difficulties when the art was young; Caxton, of London; Aldus, of Venice; Coster, of Haarlem, and Elziver, of Leyden. Here, indeed, was a mighty company which had created the art preservative of art, whose triumphant and undying spirit rode in the van of all human progress, and whose name was blessed every day by grateful mankind.

THE STORY OF THE MIRACLE

Then Caxton spoke:

“Welcome home, Master. What is that you have seen?”


A great light broke over Gutenberg's face as he replied: “My eyes have beheld the glory of a marvelous thing. At first it seemed only a splendid vision. It seemed too miraculous to be true. But it is true, and in that truth is a great message for you.”

The other shades now crowded about him, eagerness written all over their faces. As they pressed nearer, Gutenberg drew a large picture from beneath his tunic and held it up. His manner was that of a priest displaying a holy relic. Holding aloft the picture, Gutenberg said:

“Here, my brothers, you behold the realization of our great dream.”

“But what is it?” asked Aldus, as his mind harked back to that Venetian day when the waters lapped the door-step of his printery and the struggle was hard.

“It is the picture of the greatest printing press ever built,” replied Gutenberg with dignity and emphasis.



“It is called ‘The Frank A. Munsey,’ and it was made by R. Hoe & Co. I saw it in a wonderland of print, known as the Munsey Printing Plant, which is located in a seething kingdom of a city called New York.” He paused a moment as the memory of his experience swept over him.

“Now,” continued the Master, “you will know why I disappeared a short time ago. One day, while taking my usual walk, the perfume of printer’s ink was wafted to my nostrils. It stirred me like a great emotion. I followed the path of print down all the years that have elapsed since we came here until I reached New York; until I found myself at that great building, larger than our finest Rathhaus, where the Munsey publications are printed. There I saw this monster press, roaring, whirling, and producing in less than a minute what took all the presses of our day a whole year to turn out.

“As I stood transfixed by the sight, a man asked me if I would like to have a picture of the press. Of course I said yes. I expected him to sit down and draw one. Instead, there was a flash that almost blinded me. I leaped back in horror, expecting to be struck by flying fragments of steel. Instead, the smoke cleared away, and there stood the giant press, erect and quivering; still the magnificent and thrilling embodiment of energy and speed. I could scarcely believe my eyes.

“But I was destined to greater surprise. In a few minutes the man handed me this picture, which was a perfect reproduction of the press. It was so natural that I expected to see the wheels turn. ‘Have you wrought a miracle?’ I asked. ‘No,’ replied the man, ‘we have simply taken a flashlight photograph.’”

He passed the picture among his fellow shades. They handled it reverently.

“The wonder of it all is that one man directs it! By turning a small wheel he starts the forest of machinery,

and by turning it again he can stop it. Its capacity is prodigious. I remember that at every revolution of the parts called cylinders it prints enough reading matter to fill three books."

THE TREASURE OF A GUTENBERG BIBLE

Gutenberg paused, and then resumed his narrative.

"Brothers," he said, "I have yet to tell of the greatest revelation. That great successor of ours—Robert Hoe by name, blessed be his memory—who built the far-famed Munsey presses, and the hundreds of other throbbing presses that proclaim the splendor of our discovery throughout the world, was a collector of books. Not long ago he was gathered to his fathers, and all of his treasures were sold.

"On the very day that I beheld his masterpiece in steel they sold the pride of his collection. And what do you think it was? It was my own forty-two line Bible that I made with my hands in Mainz in those beloved days gone by. It was handled like a sacred thing, and it brought—you will never guess—the sum of 125,000 gulden. Think of it—a prince's ransom for my poor work!

"Brothers, let us thank our stars that we were permitted to work in the past. We did not labor in vain."



I AM THE PRINTING PRESS

By ROBERT H. DAVIS

I am the printing press, born of the mother earth. My heart is of steel, my limbs are of iron, and my fingers are of brass.

I sing the songs of the world, the oratorios of history, the symphonies of all time.

I am the voice of today, the herald of tomorrow. I weave into the warp of the past the woof of the future. I tell the stories of peace and war alike.

I make the human heart beat with passion or tenderness. I stir the pulse of nations, and make brave men do braver deeds, and soldiers die.

I inspire the midnight toiler, weary at his loom, to lift his head again and gaze, with fearlessness, into the vast beyond, seeking the consolation of a hope eternal.

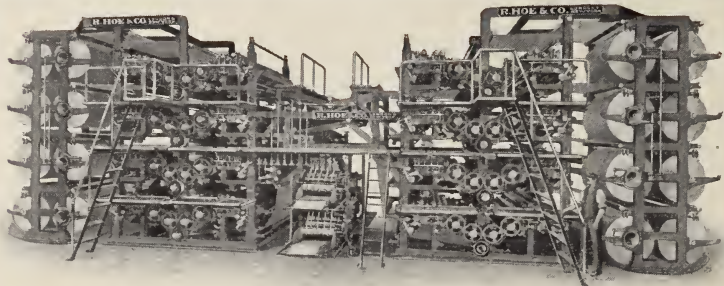
When I speak a myriad people listen to my voice. The Anglo-Saxon, the Celt, the Hun, the Slav, the Hindu, all comprehend me.

I am the tireless clarion of the news. I cry your joys and sorrows every hour. I fill the dullard's mind with thoughts uplifting. I am light, knowledge, and power. I epitomize the conquests of mind over matter.

I am the record of all things mankind has achieved. My offspring comes to you in the candle's glow, amid the dim lamps of poverty, the splendor of riches; at sunrise, at high moon, and in the waning evening.

I am the laughter and tears of the world, and I shall never die until all things return to the immutable dust.

I am the printing press.



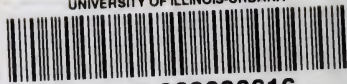
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